

Master Plan by jackwabbit

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Disclaimer: Maybe in the Upside Down, I own Stranger Things, but somehow, I doubt it.

Max was sitting with Lucas and Dustin at the arcade when Mike suddenly burst in.

"Hopper said yes!" he shouted, causing the entire party to shush him with stares and gestures.

It worked. A little. He came bounding over to the table where they were sitting and sharing a plate of nachos.

"Did you hear me?" he asked excitedly once he was in more normal hearing range.

"I think the whole arcade heard you," mumbled Lucas.

Mike looked chagrined, but as he looked around the arcade, no one seemed to be paying them any attention, so he quickly shrugged it off and sat down at the table.

"Whatever. No one will know what I meant."

"Yeah," said Dustin with a chuckle. "They probably just think you're going to marry the Chief."

Max and Lucas laughed at that, and Mike blushed.

"Shut up," he said, lightly punching Dustin on the arm.

"You shut up!" replied Dustin.

Mike sat up taller. "No, you shut up!"

"Guys!" interrupted Max. "Thought you wanted to keep a low profile?"

Both boys quieted and looked at her, then shrugged. She just rolled her eyes in response.

"Sorry," mumbled Mike. "Just got excited."

"Obviously," said Max, shoving a nacho into her mouth and crunching down on it.

"So, when are we doing this?" asked Lucas.

Mike shrugged. "I dunno. Friday?"

Dustin leveled Mike with a stare. "Friday?!"

"Yeah, Friday," said Mike. "I mean, it's not a school night."

"Mike, today is Sunday," said Dustin, in a voice a teacher or parent would use. "Friday is in five days."

"So?"

"So, there's no way we'll get this done on time. Have you ever thrown a party?"

"I think we can manage it," said Lucas, causing Mike to gesture at him in agreement.

"Yeah," said Mike. "How hard could it be?"

Dustin sighed and began ticking things off on his fingers. "There's decorations, and invitations, and snacks, and entertainment, and making sure the scheduling goes off right, and..."

Dustin trailed off as Max laughed. He looked at her sharply.

"What?" he demanded.

"Nothing," said Max, giggling again. "I just didn't see you as the party planner type."

"Dude," said Dustin seriously. "It's just me and mom, and, well, you've met her. If I don't plan something, it doesn't get done."

Max held up her hands in a surrendering gesture. "Hey, it's cool. Just surprised me, is all."

Dustin nodded. "Fair enough."

"Especially since you're right," added Max, giving Dustin a smirk and then turning to face Lucas and Mike. "There's no way we can do everything by Friday."

"But..." stammered Mike,

Dustin shook his head, all business. "Next Friday. No sooner."

Mike looked at Lucas for back up, but he just shrugged. "I'm not getting in the middle of this," he said, leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms over his chest.

"But it'll be late," whined Mike.

"Well, then you should've started this process sooner," said Justin, again with the teacher-parent voice.

Mike glared at him for a moment while Lucas munched some more nachos, wisely keeping his mouth shut and glancing back and forth between the two of them. Max, for her part, just looked thoughtful.

It was Max who broke the tension, and the silence, when her eyes suddenly got big and she smacked her hands on the table.

"It'll be okay, Mike. I've got an idea."

For the next few minutes, she revealed her plan, and when she was done, the three boys were nodding and grinning like maniacs and agreed that it just might work out after all.

Twelve days later, long after she'd given up on her friend's

remembering and thought no one cared about her other than Hopper (who had to, apparently, even when she didn't want him to), that Eleven had her first real birthday party.

To say it was a surprise would be an understatement.

To say it was flawlessly executed by a master party planner would be accurate.